

VZCZCXRO4124
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHAD #0034/01 0111308
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 111308Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1983
INFO RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0220
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 0872
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 1516
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0617
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0265

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 000034

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [KWBG](#) [UN](#) [IS](#) [AE](#)

SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN AID THE FOCUS OF PUBLIC EFFORTS ON GAZA

REF: A) ABU DHABI 20, B) ABU DHABI 17, C) 08 ABU DHABI 1467

Sensitive but unclassified. Message includes input from Consulate General Dubai.

¶1. (U) As local news outlets warn of escalation of Israeli military activity in Gaza, UAE citizens and residents are expressing solidarity, taking to the streets in calm, controlled (and relatively small) demonstrations while pledging donations in cash and in kind.

Marching in solidarity

¶2. (SBU) Local press reports suggest that a total of 10,000 persons marched in four separate locations on the afternoon of Friday, January 9 (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, and Ras al Khaimah). Police presence was extensive and marches were peaceful, with ample displays of Palestinian flags and scarves and expressions of solidarity with those suffering in Gaza. From what we observed in Abu Dhabi, the marches let off steam rather than increasing pressure. The Ministry of Interior authorized, and prepared extensively for, this series of demonstrations. (Note: Permission to demonstrate is not common in the UAE, but authorized selectively under controlled circumstances. End note.) The police presence in Abu Dhabi included buses of riot police, water cannons and concertina wire. The three events elsewhere were similarly closely monitored and involved the participation of public officials; marches in Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah lasted for approximately three hours. The Red Crescent provided leaflets to demonstrators with instructions for making donations to Gaza.

¶3. (U) Likely representative of general demonstrator sentiment, one Palestinian who grew up in the UAE was quoted in the National (semi-official English daily) as saying "We feel hopeless but this is all we can do to support Palestinians emotionally." The events were not openly political and more focused on the social and emotional costs of the conflict.

Reaching into the pocketbook

¶4. (U) A national campaign secured pledges of 315 million dirham (approximately \$ 86m) in an eight-hour media telethon on January 9. Pledges were taken over 80 telephone lines and through text messaging. Large pledges included widow of the late Sheikh Zayed, Sheikha Fatima (5m AED), Deputy Prime Minister and head of the Red Crescent Hamdan bin Zayed (10m), Federal National Council Speaker (and wealthy banker) Abdul Aziz al-Ghureir (15m), and Abu Dhabi Ruler's representative in the Western Region Mohammed bin Butti al Hamed (4m AED). The campaign is anticipated to continue and may receive some boost from Islamic scholars declaring that "you can donate anything to this campaign and deduct it from your zakat" (zakat being the annual charity donation anticipated of devout Muslims). Friday mosque sermons on the topic likely contributed to

the largesse of contributors.

¶15. (U) Parallel donation efforts are also generating funds. Collection boxes at shopping centers are bringing in both goods and cash (one Mall in Abu Dhabi reportedly netted 6 million AED on Friday). Separate Red Crescent donation tents around town add to the collection effort, as do personnel inviting donations to collection boxes extended to guests at the Friday evening screening of a new film "Journey to Mecca" (judging by the contents of the clear acrylic boxes, donations appeared to be quite generous).

¶16. (U) Red Crescent Chairman Ali al Kaabi tells of a little girl who donated her piggy bank, upon which an organizer of the event seized on the opportunity to magnify that donation and auctioned off the bank for 21,000 AED. Another said "I have no cash, but can I donate my jacket?" The media also reports that at least fifty trucks carrying 300 tons of goods purchased in Egypt had made their way to the al Arish area (near Rafah's border with Gaza), on the order of Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed.

Princely construction assistance

¶17. (U) Aside from cash and emergency humanitarian goods, senior sheikhs are extending pledges to help rebuild Gaza. President Khalifa pledged to rebuild 600 houses. Dubai Ruler (and UAE PM and VP) Mohammed bin Rashid matched that pledge with a 600-house commitment of his own. Minister of Interior Sheikh Saif bin Zayed is reported to have pledged to build 100 homes, while Presidential Affairs Minister Mansour bin Zayed pledged to build an extension to the all-important al Shifaa Hospital in Gaza.

ABU DHABI 00000034 002 OF 002

¶18. (U) Sheikh Hamdan added his commitment to mobilize the UAE Red Crescent to assist in the rebuilding of three UNRWA schools in Gaza which have been destroyed. And the newly-installed ruler of the small emirate of Um al Quwain, Sheikh Saud bin Rashid al Mualla, has offered to rebuild mosques destroyed in Gaza.

Sharing blood, and sweat

¶19. (U) The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Red Crescent Authority, is seeking to bolster its provision of health services to Palestine with blood drives in the UAE. Over 140 donors reportedly donated blood in Sharjah, an effort likely to expand to other areas of the UAE. The Dubai Cares charity drive (primarily focused on education in the Middle East), has also joined forces with other medical providers to offer specialized medical services not otherwise available in Gaza.

¶10. (U) Dubai Ruler Mohammed bin Rashid participated in (and won) an endurance race in Bahrain -- navigating his horse for the almost five-hour event on January 10. He dedicated the victory to the Palestinian people and, according to one news account, to "the souls of children and innocent civilians." He issued a statement that "The UAE will always support and stand by the Palestinian people materially, morally and politically, and will remain committed to its fundamental and invariable position until they achieve their security and freedom, regain their national rights and establish their own independent state on the soil of their homeland." He also called on Gazans to continue in patience and steadfastness.

Seeking broader international coordination

¶11. (U) Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed, in his capacity as Chair of the UAE Red Crescent Authority and Chairman of the UAE Foreign Aid Coordination Committee, has called for an emergency meeting by donating countries and international relief and humanitarian organizations to discuss the humanitarian situation in Gaza. With the primary goals of highlighting urgent priorities, the meeting is scheduled in Abu Dhabi January 12 to be chaired by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Anwar Gargash. (Resident diplomats may be the primary attendees at this meeting, which is to include briefings

by UN representatives.)
OLSON